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TAGS: [BG](#) [CVIS](#) [KFRD](#)  
SUBJECT: ITALIAN GOVERNMENT INVESTIGATES CONSULAR  
OPERATIONS AT GOI EMBASSY IN BANGLADESH

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

#### Summary

¶1. (C) Visa irregularities led the Italian Foreign Ministry to investigate consular operation at the Italian Embassy in Dhaka and to seek our analysis of Italian visa issuance practices. Based on information on the diplomatic circuit, including regular consular corps meetings, the Italian decision to investigate the matter appears well-founded. The patterns of alleged impropriety in Dhaka suggest caution in dealing with the Italian Ambassador (now assigned to Uganda we understand), particularly on US visas.

#### Italian Inspector Confides Suspicions of Visa Fraud and Seeks US Assessment

¶2. (C) Ambassador Rossi, an Italian Foreign Ministry inspector visiting from Rome, sought a meeting with the Ambassador and consular chief to ask for any insights into the Italian Embassy's visa issuance practices. She confided she was in Dhaka to look into visa problems at the Italian Embassy. The Ambassador, who arrived after the departure of Pietro Ballero, the former Italian Ambassador to Bangladesh, confided that he had heard rumors on the diplomatic circuit regarding Italian visa irregularities, including the possibility that visas were for sale. Pietro Ballero served as the Italian Ambassador to Bangladesh from August 2003 to December 2007. It is well known that the former Italian Ambassador had a close relationship with the son of former Prime Minister Zia, Tarique Rahman, who is currently in jail awaiting trial on corruption charges. Rossi explained that the Italian Consul would likely be replaced and requested the Consular Chief help integrate the newcomer into the multi-mission Fraud Prevention Officers' regular meetings so he would be integrated into the consular corps.

#### Other European Missions Concerned About Possible Malfeasance

¶3. (C) We explained to the Italian inspector that inter-mission cooperation in Dhaka was excellent, including informal and regular meetings. Chiefs of Mission meet very often; Fraud Prevention Officers meet monthly; Consular Chiefs meet quarterly. In the past, the Italian Consul had not participated in the meeting with consular chiefs -- an Anglophone meeting. We noted that European colleagues, particularly from Schengen countries frequently expressed dismay about the "Italian situation." For example, the Consular Chief's newly arrived French counterpart said Italian visa issuances had resulted in over 100 cases of political asylum in France, each producing five or more family member applications for derivative visas. Several foreign consuls claimed to have seen multiple visas approved by the former Italian Ambassador that they said had no grounds for issuance. A few days before the meeting, the French Consul reported seeing yet another visa approved by

the Italian Ambassador that had no grounds for issuance. "They all have his signature," he asserted. A widely-circulated rumor in Dhaka was that Italian visas were available for sale at a price of 10,000 Euros.

#### Examples of Questionable Schengen Visa Issuances

¶4. (SBU) Referring to reports from foreign diplomats, the Consular Chief noted the perception that the Italian Embassy routinely issued visas to applicants with multiple refusals from other Schengen countries and/or the U.K., or who had false Asian visas (e.g. Thailand, China) in their passports.

One such example was a "family" of four adults traveling with a "friend." An airline liaison officer reported to us that he had denied boarding to the family in Dhaka when he determined the passengers were not actually related and returned their passports to the Italian Consul for visa cancellation. According to the report, the Italian Ambassador advised a police officer from the Criminal Investigation Division to return the passports, with visas intact, to their rightful owners. The Consular Chief shared with Rossi the names, dates of birth, visa numbers and dates of issuance of the five passengers.

¶5. (SBU) Another suspicious case involved two men traveling together on the same flight with consecutive Schengen visa numbers and airline ticket numbers. When an airline liaison officer discovered one had a fake Chinese visa in his passport, the second passenger claimed he did not know the first one, denying they were traveling together. The first passenger was denied boarding, but there were no grounds under which the airline liaison officer could deny the second passenger boarding.

#### U.S. Mission dealings with Italian Ambassador

¶6. (C) Our own dealings with the Italian Ambassador were limited to U.S. visa applications and encounters at routine diplomatic events. The Consular Chief described the Italian Ambassador as "slightly cavalier" about visa requirements and eligibility. When he traveled to the U.S. with his Bangladeshi servant, for example, he seemed taken aback by our policy that the servant should report back to the Embassy upon his return. The servant complied, but the Italian Ambassador later wanted to take the same individual to the U.S. and drop him off with his daughter who lives there. When we refused to issue a visa, he submitted a work contract filed by his daughter's husband, an American FSO, to hire the servant. The contract was consistent with U.S. law, and the visa was issued. The Italian Ambassador claimed the servant would accompany the FSO and family on a posting in Africa a few months later.

#### Comment

¶7. (C) The Italian Foreign Ministry clearly takes the matter very seriously. It is not clear whether the current investigation will yield enough evidence to bring charges against anyone. Although the inspector did not share her assessment of the situation, it is clear that the expression "all roads lead to Rome" will no longer be true in Dhaka. Moriarty